

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Governance, General Purposes & Local Government Reorganisation Committee** held in the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, NG24 1BY on Thursday, 11 September 2025 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor R Holloway (Chair)
Councillor P Rainbow (Vice-Chair)

Councillor J Hall, Councillor P Harris, Councillor S Haynes, Councillor J Kellas, Councillor D Moore and Councillor M Shakeshaft

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor R Cozens, Councillor L Dales, Councillor N Allen and Councillor S Michael

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor P Peacock and Councillor M Pringle

1 NOTIFICATION TO THOSE PRESENT THAT THE MEETING WILL BE RECORDED AND STREAMED ONLINE

The Chair advised that the meeting was being recorded and live streamed from Castle House.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no declarations of interest.

3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN NOTTINGHAM AND NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

The Committee considered the report presented jointly by the Chief Executive and the Transformation & Service Improvement Officer which sought to provide Members with an update on the Government's requirement for local government reorganisation (LGR), including the work being undertaken to development Option 1e as a final proposal for submission in November 2025.

In presenting the report, the position of each of the Nottinghamshire councils and their preferred options was clarified. Paragraph 2 of the report set out the work being undertaken to develop the Business Case and of the collaborative work with the other Councils in developing the case for Option 1e. Members were advised that immediately following submission of the Business Case on 28 November, transitional work would commence whilst the Government were appraising the submissions. In relation to public engagement, Members were advised that there had been 10,462 responses to the survey and approximately 120 staff had attended the LGR drop-in sessions. It was also noted that following the submission of the Business Case, the Government would issue a consultation.

In considering the report, a Member stated that the public engagement survey should have included a question as to whether they supported the LGR, noting that the reorganisation would lose all local decision making. In response, the Chief Executive advised that LGR was a statutory decision. In relation to local decision making, he commented that neighbourhood committees and forums could be included in the final submission.

In response to how Members could input their views on LGR into the submission, the Chief Executive suggested that an additional meeting of the Committee be convened. Also, in response to whether Full Council would debate LGR further, the Chief Executive clarified that final approval of the Business Case was an executive decision and would be taken by Cabinet.

In considering the report and the ongoing work to develop the Business Case, a Member queried as to whether more should be done to better understand the financial implications of LGR. The Chief Executive advised that until the final decision of the Government was known the development of the Business Case was based on assumptions. He acknowledged that there had been a degree of financial modelling undertaken but that it remained a fluid situation.

In response to queries raised the Chief Executive advised that all the partner authorities were aware of Newark & Sherwood's preference for the whole of the Newark constituency to be within the new unitary authority. He added that the Local Government Association provided LGR webinars which included local authorities who had already gone through the process.

Referring to how Members might contribute to the ongoing work streams, the Chief Executive suggested that these be shared and discussed in a workshop setting, with Members requesting that they be involved in the development of the final proposal.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Governance, General Purposes & LGR Committee noted the progress update in line with their role to:

- a) oversee the plans for, and impact of, local government reorganisation within Nottingham and Nottinghamshire;
- b) liaise with and advise the Council's Cabinet, Audit & Accounts Committee, Policy & Performance Improvement Committee and other committees to ensure all Members are kept informed and provide opportunity for them to input their views on LGR; and
- c) that informal meetings of the Governance, General Purposes & LGR Committee be convened to provide Members with the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing LGR work streams.

4 HOUSING OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT HANDLING CODE SELF-ASSESSMENT UPDATE

The Committee considered the report presented by the Business Manager – Customer Services which sought to provide Members with an update on the completion of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

The report set out that the Housing Ombudsman (HO) Complaint Handling Code “the Code” set out best practice for landlord's complaint handling procedures to enable a positive complaints culture across all landlords within the social housing sector. The Code became a statutory duty on 1 April 2024 with the HO having a legal duty to ensure landlords complaint procedures and response were compliant. Part of the Code required landlords to submit an annual submission of a self-assessment,

detailing their compliance against the Code. The report listed the 9 sections of the Code and detailed that the self-assessment had been completed and reviewed by the Council's Tenant Engagement Board, noting that in all but one area the Council was compliant and that this was due to issues with reports being submitted to the appropriate committee, which the HO was aware of.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the completed Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment be approved; and
- b) publication of the Self-Assessment on the Council's website be approved.

5 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN

The Committee considered the report presented by the Business Manager – Customer Services which sought to provide Members with information in relation to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter.

The report set out that the LGSCO produced an annual review letter detailing the number, type and decisions made in relation to each authority. The review letter was attached as an appendix to the report and detailed that 16 complaints and decisions had been made relating to services provided by the Council. This was in comparison to 11 received and 9 decisions made for 2023/2024. An explanation of how complaints were dealt with was provided at paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 of the report. Table 2 within the report set out the category of complaint and the outcome of each decision.

In response to the issue raised of damage caused by a Council contractor and the decision of the Ombudsman, the Chief Executive commented that the purpose of the Council's complaints process was to provide a learning opportunity. The Business Manager advised that a dedicated Customer Satisfaction Officer was now in post within Customer Services and that contact was made with complainants to ascertain if they felt their complaint had been satisfactorily dealt with.

AGREED (unanimously) that the contents of the report be noted.

6 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK - HALF YEAR 2 - 2024/2025

The Committee considered the report presented by the Senior Transformation & Service Improvement Officer which sought to provide Members with information as to what complaints had been submitted across the Council. It also provided an opportunity to understand how the customer was receiving the services delivered.

The report provided an overview of all types of customer feedback between October 2024 to March 2025 which included: numbers received; types of feedback – praise or complaint; and how the complaints were dealt with and categorised.

In considering the report a Member referred to a review undertaken of the system used with a view to improving the handling of complaints. He also referred to the results of any blind tests carried out, requesting that these be included in the Half Year 1 – 2025/2026 report.

In referring to Table 2 within the report, a Member requested that additional detail be provided in future report to enable a better understanding of the complaints received.

AGREED (unanimously) that the report be noted.

7 CODE OF CONDUCT ANNUAL REPORT - 1 MAY 2024 TO 30 APRIL 2025

The Committee considered the report presented by the Assistant Director – Legal & Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer which sought to provide Members with details of Code of Conduct complaints received in 2024/2025 together with related matters.

The report set out the number of complaints received relating to district and town/parish councillors. The report provided: a summary of complaints received, the complainant type together with a summary of the outcomes in relation to complaints received. Details of the formal investigations and Code of Conduct hearings were provided together with information relating to Register of Members' Interests; Code of Conduct training; Government consultation on Code of Conduct; and Conduct and Public Service.

In considering the report, Members raised a number of queries in relation to the complaints process. In response, the Assistant Director advised that complainants are kept informed of progress, adding that whenever possible the Monitoring Officer would attempt to resolve a complaint without taking it any further, noting that formal investigations were a slow and costly process with only minor sanctions available at the end of the process.

In noting reference to political motivation for complaints received, the Chief Executive advised that he had discussed with the Monitoring Officer the possibility of introducing a policy to mirror that which was used for members of the public in relation to unreasonable behaviour, suggesting that a Member and Officer workshop be held to explore this further.

In referring to the cost implications of investigations as detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the report, the Monitoring Officer noted the volume of complaints received and highlighted the amount of Officer time taken to review the initial complaints.

In response to the Chief Executive's comments that complaints in relation to incidents of misconduct were not always submitted, a Member stated that sanctions available following a breach of the Code of Conduct were of little use and therefore did not encourage this course of action.

In noting the increase in the number of complaints since 2023, it was suggested that there had been a deterioration in standards nationally, which was reflected at a local level.

Reflecting on the debate in relation to the annual report, Members agreed that they would wish to see additional detail in future reports which would enable them to make informed decisions.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the annual Code of Conduct Report be noted;
- b) particular focus will be given to social media at the next Code of Conduct Refresher Session for all Members be noted; and
- c) the communications strategy for the Local Government Association Debate not Hate campaign be endorsed and noted.

8 REMOTE ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS AND PROXY VOTING

The Committee considered the report presented by the Business Manager – Elections & Democratic Services which sought to provide Members with an update on the Government consultation on remote attendance at meetings and proxy voting.

The report set out the reasoning behind the consultation and that it was Government's intention to amend the law to introduce provisions for remote attendance at local authority meetings. The intention was to permit local authorities to develop their own locally appropriate policies to facilitate this change in law. In relation to proxy voting, the plan was to require principal councils to implement a proxy voting scheme to provide consistency for Members who were absent due to, for example, becoming a new parent.

In considering the report a Member noted that the consultation responses indicated that local authorities were against allowing proxy voting, however, the Government appeared to be proceeding with this. The Business Manager advised that the use of proxy voting may be restricted to meetings of Full Council only. In relation to whether this may impact on town and parish councils, the Business Manager advised that this would likely be dependent on the size of the parish but that until the legislation was published, the full extent of the changes would not be known.

AGREED (unanimously) that the contents of the report be noted.

In accordance with Section 100(B)(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair has agreed to take the following item as a late item of business in order to enable Eakring Parish Council to take decisions and co-opt new councillors to fill the current vacancies as soon as possible.

9 LATE ITEM - EAKRING PARISH COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

The Committee considered the late item presented by the Business Manager – Elections & Democratic Services which sought Members' approval to make an Order under Section 91 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to temporarily appoint the Ward Members for Rainworth North & Rufford onto Eakring Parish Council to enable the parish council to meet to take decisions and co-opt to fill current vacancies.

The report set out that following the May 2023 parish elections, Eakring Parish Council had seen a number of changes and recent resignations resulting in there only being two elected members and therefore being unable to act. As noted at paragraph 1.3 of the report, in such circumstances the district council is able to temporarily appoint persons to fill all or any of the vacancies until other councillors are elected and take up office. It was therefore proposed to make the Order to temporarily appoint Councillors Claire Penny and Linda Tift to Eakring Parish Council.

AGREED (unanimously) that the making of an Order under Section 91 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to temporarily appoint the Ward Members for Rainworth North & Rufford onto Eakring Parish Council be approved.

10 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the Governance, General Purposes & LGR Committee's Work Programme; and
- b) the Audit & Accounts Committee be recommended to include issues surrounding the hacking of data centres to their Work Programme.

Meeting closed at 8.35 pm.

Chair